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June 7, 2004

To: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair Pro Tem
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Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: David Sanders, Ph.D.
Director

APRIL 27, 2004 BOARD AGENDA ITEM #13: KIDSAVE

On April 27, 2004, in a response to a motion by Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, the Board ordered the Department of Children and Family Services to review the model developed by Kidsave as it relates to finding parents for older youth and report back to the Board with recommendations to incorporate the Kidsave model into the Department's plan to increase permanency for foster youth in Los Angeles County, ages 14 years and older.

Managers from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Adoptions Division and Permanency and Resource Division participated in a series of conferences and meetings with the Executive Director and managers of the Kidsave program to review the Kidsave model for finding permanent homes for older children.

Over the last 14 months, Kidsave has been in the process of developing a protocol in partnership with Fairfax County, Virginia for a Weekend Miracles program. The concept for this program is to build a pool of families who will support permanence for older children by incorporating a combination of strategies including: community education and outreach, short stays over weekends with host families who act as personal advocates, child preparation and support, personal advocacy by lay people, the development of a mentoring program, family support, and social work training. The protocol for this model is still in the process of being developed and Kidsave along with Fairfax County hope to have it completed by the end of August 2004.

Kidsave and DCFS agree that the most expedient and efficient manner to establish a Weekend Miracles Program in Los Angeles is to await the completion of the Virginia protocol and utilize it as the foundation for the Los Angeles Program.

The Kidsave Weekend Miracles program contains elements that are directly in line with the Department's plan of March 18, 2004 to increase permanency for foster youth ages 14 and older, as well as the Adoption Recruitment Plan submitted to the Board on December 26, 2003. These elements of the Weekend Miracles program include: 1) The exploration and implementation of more creative adoption recruitment strategies, particularly their host family and advocacy plan, 2) Training and motivating social workers to believe that permanence can be achieved for all children and that no child should be left behind, 3) Providing aggressive education and outreach to the community regarding adoptions of older youth, 4) Having youth actively participate in their own recruitment and the creation of their permanent plan, and 5) Engaging parents who have previously adopted to participate in recruitment of other adoptive families. Kidsave is an evidence-based program and has demonstrated their success with quantitative data. They have engaged UCLA and the University of North Carolina to evaluate the ongoing success of their program.

The Weekend Miracles protocol for Fairfax County is extensive and is currently a 68-page document, which identifies the program sequence and details the roles and responsibilities for foster parents, mentors, host families, advocates, community supporters and volunteers, adoptive parents, Kidsave staff, and county staff. This protocol still needs to address outcome measures, training of staff and host families, reporting responsibilities, the role of private agencies, and the monetary and county staff resources needed to support the program.

During the next 3 months while Kidsave is finalizing their protocol with Fairfax County, DCFS will be identifying children to be included in the Los Angeles County Weekend Miracles program. The target population will first include legally freed children between the ages of 8 and 17, with the emphasis on the placement needs of children ages 14 and over, who have no permanent plan identified for them. Older children who are not legally freed, but have no connections and would benefit from a more permanent plan may also be included. One or two Service Provider Areas (SPAs) will be identified to begin the roll out of the program. At the same time, Kidsave will continue to seek more funding sources and continue to develop partnerships with businesses in the community to access other resources.

As this is a private and public funded partnership, DCFS will be evaluating the County commitment needed for the Weekend Miracles program. Once a budget is established, DCFS will assess what costs can be absorbed, what can be pulled from other resources, what money will need to be raised, and the possibility of accessing Title IV-E funds if the waiver is granted. DCFS is currently developing a volunteer recruitment group that may help in offsetting the recent budget cuts in the DCFS recruitment program.

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It is expected that the Fairfax County protocol will be completed by the end of August 2004. DCFS would like to report back to the Board of Supervisors by late September 2004, with a full evaluation of the Fairfax County protocol. Further, DCFS will make a determination as to the financial and staffing resources that are in existence, as well as what resources will be needed to develop and successfully implement a Los Angeles County Weekend Miracles program that will help achieve our outcome goal of reducing timelines to permanence for older children.

DS:TP:dw

c: Chief Administrative Officer
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel